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Congresswoman Betty McCollum
Extension of Remarks
January 14, 2009

Ms. McCOLLUM: Madam Speaker, it was my honor today to be recognized by Global Action for Children with the Champion for Children Award. Launched in 2003, the Global Action for Children is a nonpartisan, results-oriented coalition dedicated to advocating for orphans and highly vulnerable children in the developing world. I intended to give the following remarks, but was unable to do so due to Congressional business. I would like to enter my remarks for this event into the Congressional record.

Comments on the Champion for Children Award

Good afternoon.

It is an honor to receive this award from Global Action for Children. Long after I am gone from Washington, if there is one thing people say about me, I hope it is "she was a champion for children."

I would like to thank Jennifer Delaney for all of her work and for the hard work of her staff. I first worked with Jennifer in 2003 on the original PEPFAR bill to secure funding for AIDS orphans and vulnerable children. Jennifer's dedication and commitment to fight for children around the world – and to build the partnerships necessary to be successful – is an inspiration. She is a tremendous resource for Members' offices and I am very proud to be here with her today.

I would also like to congratulate my colleagues from the Senate – Senators Lugar and Dodd – on their awards today. Their commitment to children is well known and I look forward to working with them in the 111th Congress to make the needs of our planet's next generation a priority domestic and foreign policy issue.

I came to Congress eight years ago. During my time as in the U.S. House there have 80 million newborns and young children around the world have died from mostly preventable or easily treatable diseases – 80 million children.

Four million mothers have died from pregnancy related causes, most of which could have been averted with access to basic healthcare.

Nearly 10 million more children will needlessly die across this planet from malnutrition, dirty water, treatable infections, and global apathy. This is a tragedy of enormous proportions that we can help to stop – we MUST help to stop.

For all the mothers and fathers in the room today, do you think a mother or father in Bangladesh, Zambia or Guatemala loves their newborn or toddler less than we love our children?

Every parent loves their children and wants them not only to survive but thrive and succeed.

In the 111th Congress, let us work together – policy makers, global health advocates and citizens – to make the policy improvements and funding investments to save the lives of millions more newborns, children and mothers.

Let us work to make child survival and maternal health the global health priority of this Congress.

As President-elect Obama looks at the foreign policy landscape there needs to be some major reforms in the manner in which development assistance is delivered.

We need a new comprehensive strategy and the tools to execute that strategy. We need to invest the hard earned tax dollars of our citizens in building a better world – a safer world – a more peaceful world. And, we need to see outcomes for our investments that can be demonstrated.

Here is an investment idea and an outcome I'd like to see this Congress act upon: How about investing a billion dollars to save the lives of a million newborns and children? Do you think the American people would support a billion dollar investment that saved a million young lives?

I think they would.

Congress, working hand-in-hand with the Obama Administration, needs to refocus our strategy for development assistance to focus on the basics. In addition to focusing on child survival and maternal health, we need to increase investment in agriculture development to reduce malnutrition, increase family incomes and reduce the demand for emergency food aid.

Let us help to expand access to clean water, preventing water born illnesses.

We must maintain our commitment to fighting HIV/AIDS while not backing away from the need to assist orphans and vulnerable children grow up healthy, productive and safe in their communities.

Finally, we need a foreign policy that recognizes that hundreds of millions of children around the world are confronting violence, absolute poverty, hunger and lives of misery on a daily basis.

Think of the children in Gaza, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in Zimbabwe and how they are suffering. Their lives will forever be shaped by violence. We need to work to make the world safe for children and that means aggressive, smart diplomacy that works to prevent political crisis and conflicts. If we are truly a superpower we need not simply stand by and watch the escalation of violence and suffering, we must work to prevent it.

Let start making the world safer for children by advancing a child-based development agenda – such as the EMERGENCY PRESIDENTIAL INITIATIVE FOR THE WORLD'S CHILDREN

being proposed by Global Action for Children here today. This is exactly the type of bold commitment the United States should and can make to the world's children.

Let me conclude by speaking about commitment. Every parent knows that bringing a child into this world means a commitment until that child becomes an adult. It means meeting the child's physical needs, creating a safe environment, sharing love and protecting your child from harm. This is universal across all cultures.

A similar type of commitment on the part of states to children is embodied in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Yet, the United States, along with Somalia, are the only two nations on the face of the Earth which have not ratified this treaty, not formalized our commitment to our own children and the world's children. This is an embarrassment that I hope is addressed by the U.S. Senate this Congress.

Every child – where ever he or she is born – is a child of God and a blessing.

Therefore, every child should be recognized as possessing the human dignity and basic human rights we all share and we all expect for our own children. If this is in fact true and you believe it, and I know you do – then we've got lots of work to do.

Thank you all for making the world's children a priority and for recognizing that their rights and their well-being are as important as our own children's.